



EPISODE 2x16:

"TRAP"

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of the "Serenity" Motion Picture by Joss Whedon

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Teaser

EXT. SPACE – ESTABLISHING

SERENITY glides through the black, her engines leaving a bright TRAIL.

INT. SERENITY – GALLEY – NIGHT

BEN HICKS stands in front of the bank of cabinets. He opens one. Closes it. Opens the door next to it. Closes it. Then a third.

JAYNE (OS)

What the ruttin' hell're you doin', boy!?

JAYNE sits at the table, eating a bowl of noodles and broth with a pair of chopsticks.

JAYNE (cont'd)

'Sides makin' me imagine ten ways to end you.

BEN

I, um... Tea. I'm looking for tea.

KAYLEE (OS)

Three to the left, one down.

KAYLEE comes in from the aft hallway.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

You don't look too good.

BEN

I'm not sleeping right. Nearly a week without touchin' dirt!

Kaylee gets a CANISTER of tea out of the proper cabinet and hands it to Ben. She reaches past him, opens another cabinet, and pulls out a canister for herself.

JAYNE

(slurping)

Yeah, that's a thing Mal does now.

BEN

I just want to get home.

Kaylee grabs a deep PAN and heads for the stove-top.

KAYLEE

Cap'n'll have you dirtside on Haven soon's he can, Ben.

JAYNE

Soon's he stops runnin'. Which'll be... let's see here...

("calculates" for a beat)

Never.

Silence, except for Jayne's slurping.

JAYNE (cont'd)

What!? Like you ain't noticed just how much time we
been spendin' between planets and paydays lately?

Long's we got the 'Verse's most wanted on board, that
ain't gonna change.

Kaylee pours a bunch of small, hard KERNELS into the pan: POPCORN.

KAYLEE

So whadda we do, Jayne? Sell 'em for parts?

A beat as Jayne grins.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

That ain't gonna happen, Jayne. Simon an' River are
family!

JAYNE

(shrugs)

You don't keep family chained down in the pantry.

Ben, startled, looks at the pantry door.

KAYLEE

That ain't fair, Jayne! She ain't there no more. Cap'n was
just bein' ginger 's'all! 'Sides, we ain't never been on the
right side of the law. You really think we'd be having
fancy cakes and drinkin' bubbly wine if the Cap'n cut
them loose?

Jayne takes a final slurp of his noodles, then tosses the chopsticks down.

JAYNE

Ain't never gonna find out 'til Mal <grows a set>.

INT. SERENITY – RIVER’S ROOM – SAME TIME

RIVER lies in her bed, sleeping fitfully, her brow knit. SIMON sits in a chair on the far side of the room, watching a PORTABLE PDA-LIKE VIDEO DEVICE.

RIVER (on device)
It can’t be quantified. The noise. It drowns you all in your own fluids **and you’re too busy talking to see!**

On the bed, the real River twitches a little. Simon is so intent on the device that he doesn’t notice.

RIVER (cont’d, on device)
Can’t. See. Anyone. Hiding beneath pretense, the lot of you! Come out, come out and play... I won’t bite if you don’t—

RIVER
(incoherently)
...don’t... lie down... Never lie... down...

River starts thrashing about in her sleep, her FEET lashing against the BULKHEAD.

Simon jumps out of the seat and rushes to the side of her bunk.

SIMON
River!

The dropped device falls to the ground, face down, and continues to play, River’s recorded conversation muffled and unintelligible.

SIMON (cont’d)
Wake up!

He shakes her, but she doesn’t wake. He shakes her HARD.

RIVER
(groggy, coming around)
Simon.

SIMON
Another nightmare?

RIVER
She’s real. Not a nightmare... Miranda’s real.

SIMON
I want to take you there, *mei mei*, but you know we can’t go.

RIVER
Because of the Reavers.

Simon nods and smooths her hair.

SIMON
Go back to sleep, River. I'll be here when you wake up.

River shakes her head violently.

RIVER
No more dreams... Please... It can't be quantified.

Simon looks at her, then at the device on the floor, then back at her.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

WASH is in the pilot's seat, ZOE straddling him. Playing with his hair – as much affection as steamy-osity.

ZOE
Why are we here?

He kisses her neck.

ZOE (cont'd)
Why are we on the bridge? The ship isn't flying anywhere.
I'm pretty certain...

WASH
Mal wants me here, in case we crash into a moon... or something.

ZOE
And we're gonna wait up here 'til we do?

Wash puts a little distance between them.

WASH
(strangely pensive)
Well, things are... they're bad, aren't they? Not our usual wacky sort of bad. Feels like something's catching up to us.

ZOE
Then we should be in our bunk, using what time we got.

She kisses him. Wash relaxes, smiles.

WASH

You're so wise. Wise and dirty. It's a powerful—

One of the screens LIGHTS UP, indicating an incoming MESSAGE.

WASH (cont'd)

Aha! See? Something's...

They look at the screen, both a tad perplexed.

WASH (cont'd)

Oh.

INT. SERENITY – MAL'S BUNK – SAME TIME

MAL lies asleep in his bunk, SHIRTLESS. His back is covered with old war wounds, a network of SCAR TISSUE.

WASH (via com)

(for the third time)

Mal, you up?

MAL

(he's not)

Whuh huh nuhwhat?

WASH (via com)

I got a Wave. I'm gonna bounce it down to you.

Mal gets up from his bunk and walks over to his WALL-MOUNTED SCREEN. He punches the ACTIVATION BUTTON and the screen flickers to life, revealing...

MAL

(suddenly awake)

Inara.

INARA is on Mal's screen, in a beautiful dress and veil. We see her from about chest level up. She, presumably, sees the same of Mal.

INARA

I, uh... Is this a bad time?

MAL

(smoothing his hair)

No, this... good as any.

INARA

Please tell me you're wearing pants.

MAL
(slight grin)
Naked as the day I come cryin'. How's your world?

INARA
Cold. It's autumn here.

MAL
Still at the Training House?

INARA
Right where you left me.

MAL
I remember it as nice enough. Picturesque.

INARA
It is at that. What about you?

MAL
Still flying.

INARA
Everyone in good health?

MAL
Pink and rosy. So, what occasions the Wave? Not that to see you ain't... Well... You look very fine.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Zoe and Wash are secretly watching both Mal and Inara on two different screens, smiling at their formal shyness.

Jayne enters, munching on a bowl of Kaylee's now-popped popcorn, wondering what's up...

INT. SERENITY – MAL'S BUNK - SAME TIME

INARA
Thank you. I... I don't even know if you're anywhere nearby, but... we're having some problems with the locals here, and I thought maybe...

MAL
You could use a gun hand?

INARA

I'm hoping not, but... There's a neighborhood general who's been pressuring the girls to... Well, I think you'd get the drift straight off if you saw.

Uncomfortable moment. She looks away.

MAL

Fellow needs a talking to.

INARA

Could be. But if you're booked up, I don't want to—

MAL

I'll be truthful: we got a little more work than we can handle, for once. And we ain't exactly close by.

INARA

Of course. I understand.

MAL

Didn't say no. But, ah, let me sound out the crew. See how they stand.

INARA

Of course. If you wind up near us, you – the crew – could take your ease here a while... and there'd be payment...

MAL

Payment is never not a factor. This pot like to boil over soon?

INARA

Soon. Not right away.

MAL

Well, it would be... I mean, I'd like to. Kaylee's been missing you something fierce—

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

There is a general GROAN among the audience, which now includes Ben and Kaylee (with enough popcorn to share).

KAYLEE

Oh, they're so pathetic!

She tosses a handful of popcorn at the screen.

INT. SERENITY – MAL'S BUNK – SAME TIME

INARA

I miss her too. I even miss my shuttle, occasionally.

It couldn't possibly be more awkward.

MAL

Yeah, you left a, um... Got some of your stuff in a trunk. I never did get a chance to drop it off.

Oh, wait. Yes, it CAN.

INARA

I didn't mean to leave stuff—

MAL

I didn't look through... the stuff... Just sundries I expect.

Now that they're both done lying, Inara smiles blandly, nods. An awkward beat.

MAL

Well, it's kind of late where I am. I'll send you a Wave, soon as I can.

INARA

Thank you.

MAL

So, bye...

INARA

Yes. Okay.

MAL

Right.

The screen blinks out. Mal thinks a moment.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal comes in, buttoning his SHIRT. Wash offers Mal a handful of popcorn, which he doesn't take.

WASH

Inara. Nice to see her again.

ZOE
(briskly, to Mal)
So, trap?

MAL
Trap.

ZOE
We goin' in?

MAL
Ain't but a few hours out...

WASH
Yeah, but, remember the part where it's **a trap**?

MAL
If that's the case, then Inara's already caught in it. She wouldn't set us up willing. If this is knotted up with our other troubles, it might be we got a shot at seeing who's turning these wheels. We go in.

KAYLEE
How can you be sure Inara don't just wanna see you? Sometimes people have feelings — I'm referring here to people...

MAL
Y'all were watching, I take it?

Guilty glances all around. Jayne crunches his popcorn noisily.

KAYLEE
Yes.

MAL
You see us fight?

KAYLEE
No.

MAL
Trap.

Act One

EXT. BENA – COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – MORNING – ESTABLISHING

Bena is a lush and tranquil world of tall trees, beautiful mountains, and winding rivers. The Companion Training House, looking not unlike an expensive and well-appointed Buddhist temple, sits at the top of a cliff, a river turning into a crashing waterfall right next to it.

We hear the sounds of a haunting ceremonial CHANT sung in Mandarin—

EXT. BENA – RIVERBANK – MORNING

—by twenty COMPANIONS and COMPANIONS IN TRAINING, all dressed in white, heading to the fog-shrouded riverbank in procession. Six of them bear a BIER, also draped in white. The rest carry an array of CANDLES, CENSERS, and ORNATE OPEN-TOPPED BOXES.

The chanting continues, and those carrying the bier walk right to the river's edge and into the water.

They lower the bier into the river and the half-dozen bearers remove the top, revealing the body of SHEYDRA, reposing in a white robe under a sheer white gossamer shroud.

Sheydra's bier drifts down the river, and the Companions carrying the open-topped boxes come forward to the river's edge. They slowly upend the boxes, spilling hundreds of WHITE ORAGAMI SWANS – a thousand of them, in fact – into the water.

The current catches the swans and they rush down the river, some following the bier, many overtaking it, swept away, as they rush toward the ROAR of the waterfall, which threatens to drown out the chant.

We follow one particular swan as it makes its way down the river, drifting to the side. Our little swan heads right for—

EXT. BENA – RIVERBANK – STONE OUTCROPPING – CONTINUOUS

Where it lodges between two rocks. Stuck. Its fellow swans begin to pass it by.

A HAND reaches down and gently removes the swan. Straightens its wings. Puts it carefully back in the water, allowing it to join the others.

The hand belongs to THE OPERATIVE, who stands and looks out at the river. He wears a black military overcoat over a non-descript dark blue outfit. He stands next to Inara, who, in sharp contrast, wears an elegant and elaborate white outfit. She is not, however, wearing make-up, and bears healing bruises and cuts from last episode.

OPERATIVE

You've done the right thing by contacting your Captain.
You've allowed Sheydra to receive a proper funeral.

They watch the swans float by.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Hers was a good death, Inara. A death with purpose.

INARA

<None of it means a damned thing>.

The Operative turns to look at her. She's shivering.

OPERATIVE

You're cold. I apologize for my thoughtlessness.

The Operative takes off his coat, drapes it around her shoulders. She doesn't react.

INARA

He won't come.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

I know this man. From his war records, and from what you've told me... He'll come.

INARA

Malcolm Reynolds is not a fool. He'll know this is a trap.

OPERATIVE

Which is precisely why he must come. For you.

Inara gives the Operative an icy glare, then shrugs out of his coat, leaving it in a pile on the ground. She turns and walks away from him.

As she moves away, two ALLIANCE SOLDIERS step in to flank her, escorting her toward the other Companions – who we now see are also “escorted” by more than a dozen soldiers.

The Operative bends to retrieve his coat. Brushes the dirt off.

OPERATIVE
(quietly)
He fancies himself a hero, Inara. And like a hero, he will come.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Zoe sits in the co-pilot's seat, looking at one of the monitors. Wash lounges in his chair, watching her, and Mal stands behind her, trying to look over her shoulder.

MAL
What about sewers? Are there sewers I can sneak through?

ZOE
Don't appear to be, sir.

MAL
How can they not have sewers? Everybody needs sewers.

WASH
(leaning back)
Maybe not Companions, Mal. They are pretty fancible.

MAL
(ignoring him)
Check again. There have to be sewers.

He leans closer over her shoulder. Jayne walks in behind him and also leans close.

ZOE
There ain't no—

JAYNE
What're we lookin' at?

WASH
Maps.

JAYNE
Shiny.
(picks his teeth)
Maps of what?

ZOE

Schematics. The training house at Bena.
(points vaguely in Wash's direction)
Planetary topography. Anything Ben could pull off the
Cortex without sending up a flag.

JAYNE

That boy ain't useless.

WASH

Almost like having our very own Mister Universe onboard.

ZOE

But with hygiene.

WASH

There is that.

ZOE

(to Mal)

So what's the caper, sir?

MAL

(shrugs)

My big plan began and ended with sewers.

ZOE

Like so many others.

(thinks)

How many ships you think the Alliance is like to have
between us and Inara?

WASH

It's a good bet they know we've got River, so I'll go out
on a limb here and say a LOT.

JAYNE

We ain't gonna win this fight, Mal.

MAL

Alliance wants a fight, I'll give them one, but I'm not
gonna go in lookin' to start things.

Jayne straightens, towering over Mal.

JAYNE

Why go in there at all? Why not find the nearest Alliance
ship and give 'em what they want? River in exchange for
Inara.

MAL
(hard eye contact with Jayne)
That ain't a deal we're makin'.

Jayne glares, arms folded.

JAYNE
I ain't gonna die 'cause you won't—

MAL
Not today. Not any day. Get it through your skull.

Mal and Jayne hold one another's looks for an uncomfortable beat, then—

ZOE
He's not wrong, sir.

Everyone looks at her. "WHAT!?"

ZOE (cont'd)
We fight, we die.

WASH
Okay. Shiny. So, new plan. Fight-free.

Everyone just looks around, idea-poor.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – MORNING

The Operative and Inara walk through the Training House, headed toward Inara's rooms. Along the way, they pass ALLIANCE SOLDIERS and a few COMPANIONS-IN-TRAINING who are moving to and fro through the corridors.

OPERATIVE
It was a moving ceremony, really. I feel quite honored to have been able to witness it. The dirge, if I'm correct, dates back to Earth-that—

INARA
Why are you doing this?

He stops walking, forcing her to do the same.

OPERATIVE
Inara... You know why I'm doing this. River Tam is a danger to all those around her. She must be—

INARA

That's not what I mean.

(frustrated)

Why do you have to pretend to care about me? You're planning to kill everyone I care about.

OPERATIVE

Serenity's crew needn't die. Captain Reynolds and the others are simple obstacles between me and River Tam. I will remove them forcibly, if necessary, but should they remove themselves willingly—

INARA

Is that all I was to you, Jude? An obstacle?

He looks away. Continues walking.

She follows, and they arrive at her door.

INARA (cont'd)

What are you planning to do if Captain Reynolds doesn't come here?

OPERATIVE

What will you do when he does?

She turns away, opening her door.

INARA

I'll take my leave now. Please inform your soldiers that I'm not to be disturbed.

She enters her rooms.

EXT. SPACE – BENA ORBIT

BENA appears as a bright GREEN AND BROWN BALL against the BLACK of space.

Serenity, mostly powered down, sits a fair distance off.

Between Bena and *Serenity*: four ALLIANCE PATROL BOATS prowl like sharks.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits. Zoe stands behind him.

ZOE

Only four ships. Something feels off.

WASH

Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth, honey. I'll scurry us in safe, and Mal can go get Inara.

ZOE

How long?

WASH

If the schedules Ben gave us are right, less than an hour.

INT. SERENITY – RIVER'S ROOM

River sits on her bunk, drawing a sketch of a ballerina. She stops suddenly. Looks up sharply.

She drops noiselessly off the bed and pads to the door, silent as a cat. She WHIPS the door open—

RIVER

I can hear you.

—startling Jayne, who is lurking on the other side.

JAYNE

Gorramit, girl!

RIVER

You're right.

JAYNE

Huh?

RIVER

I am dangerous. Simon won't admit it because he's my brother. You, though... You understand. You're afraid... afraid of what I might do.

Jayne edges away from her.

JAYNE

No I'm not. Only thing scares me is Reavers.

RIVER

Fear is a good motivator. Makes you human. Lose the fear, become a machine.

JAYNE
I told you. I ain't afraid.

RIVER
Just Reavers.

Jayne backs out of the room.

RIVER (cont'd)
Reaver. River. Only a phoneme apart. Funny how no one
comments.

INT. SERENITY – INARA’S SHUTTLE

Mal sits on the floor of Inara’s shuttle. In front of him lies a TRUNK.

INARA (OS)
You promised to help me pack.

Her voice comes from a video CAPTURE that Mal’s holding. Inara smiles up at him.

KAYLEE (via capture, OS)
Honest, Inara, why do you have to leave?

On the capture, Inara’s face becomes uncertain. The image freezes, then loops back to the beginning. Mal looks past Inara’s face at the contents of the trunk. Candles, incense, clothing half-pulled out...

He pushes everything back in, shuts the lid of the trunk, sets the capture down, and stands.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – SAME TIME

The place is a mess. Kaylee stands in the middle of ten METAL BARRELS. Wiring, cable, and indecipherable electronic and mechanical devices are strewn everywhere. Kaylee grins as she surveys the mess.

BEN (OS)
Kaylee! Catch!

Kaylee turns, as Ben, trotting down the stairs, tosses her some sort of small DEVICE, clipped wires sticking out all around it. She catches it.

BEN (cont'd)
Mal tell you why he needed this thing pulled?

KAYLEE

Said it had something to do with rescuing Inara.

Ben's now on ground level, poking through the electronics. He looks as excited as Kaylee.

Simon joins them, rolling in another metal barrel.

SIMON

For a man who can't seem to figure out what he wants, Mal is pretty quick to run straight into the face of the Alliance to save her.

BEN

You'd rather he run into Reaver territory to get to Miranda, doc?

Simon's look says that's exactly what he's thinking.

KAYLEE

You know the Cap'n can't do that. It'd be suicide... and us being dead ain't gonna do nobody no good, least of all River.

Simon sighs and leans back against the wall.

SIMON

It's just frustrating that we know where to go to help River, and yet can't do anything about it.

Mal walks down the stairs, joining them.

MAL

Kaylee, you got that thingee—?

She's tosses the device to him. He barely manages to catch it.

MAL (cont'd)

—pulled?

(notices Simon)

Doc. I ain't lookin' for a fight today.

SIMON

Neither am I.

Mal and Simon look at each other uncomfortably.

SIMON (cont'd)

I'd... Whatever I can do to help rescue Inara, just say the word.

MAL

Appreciate that, Doc. Come to mention it, I wouldn't mind if your sister were maybe a little more comatose than usual. Wouldn't do to have her go all woolly at the exact wrong minute.

SIMON

Captain I—
(beat)

No, you're right. Whatever is necessary to get Inara back.

The ship suddenly SHUDDERS, like a boat caught in a fast current.

MAL

That's our cue.

EXT. SPACE – BENA ORBIT

One of the Alliance patrol boats crosses the darkness. As it passes, another ship, a GIANT FREIGHTER, spewing flame from giant sun-like engines, slides by. The side of the freighter is emblazoned with the logo of "Three Fortunes Freight & Shipping" in English and Mandarin.

EXT. BENA

The Three Fortunes freighter enters the atmosphere with a ROAR. As it descends, we get a good look at the flaming engines.

Serenity is right behind, all but invisible within the flames, practically being furnace-blasted as it follows.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Wash try not to look directly at the light. Also sweating.

ZOE

We got about half a minute before our wiring fuses and we're an art object.

WASH

Just a few more seconds...

ZOE
You used those up saying that.

MAL
Wash...

WASH
Little sweaty, thanks for asking—

ZOE
Drop dead!

Wash hits a couple of switches and Serenity goes dark.

EXT. BENA – SAME TIME

Serenity drops like a stone.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

ZOE
We should be under orbital scan in two thousand feet—

MAL
Call it.

ZOE
And three, two...

Wash hits the controls—

EXT. BENA – SAME TIME

Serenity's thrusters fire up. The ship levels off, then swoops gracefully over the snowy mountains.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

A sigh of relief.

MAL
Shiny.

WASH
We're about seventy miles from the Training House.

MAL

The Alliance'll be about somewhere. Find us a home. I'll take the shuttle a little closer.

He starts out, turns back to Zoe.

MAL

Zoe, ship is yours. Remember. If anything happens to me, or if you don't hear from me within the hour, you take this ship...

Here comes the noble moment.

MAL (cont'd)

...and you come and you rescue me.

Or not.

ZOE

What? And risk my ship?

MAL

I mean it. It's cold out there. I don't wanna get left.

Mal leaves the bridge.

EXT. BENA – GORGE – DAY

Serenity lies nestled in a gorge, overhanging rocks all but burying her from view.

The SHUTTLE on the right lifts off from the side of the ship and glides off, keeping low.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

A line of young TRAINEES in robes file past two ALLIANCE SOLDIERS. The trainees have red shawls pulled over their heads.

One trainee, a good deal larger than the others, walks away from the line.

Act Two

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – DAY

Inara kneels in front of her STATUE OF BUDDHA, wearing the same outfit as when she spoke with Mal. She's lighting a few incense sticks, and barely glances up as her door opens and a red-shawled trainee, carrying a TRAY OF FOOD, enters.

INARA

Please leave it on the dresser. I find I have no appetite.

The trainee places the tray on a table, then kneels down beside her.

TRAINEE/MAL

Dear Buddha, please send me a pony, and a plastic rocket, and—

INARA

Mal! What are you doing here?

MAL

(dropping the hood)
You invited me.

INARA

I never thought for a second you'd be stupid enough to come!

MAL

Well, that makes you kind of a tease, doesn't it?

INARA

You knew my invitation wasn't on the level—

MAL

Which led me to conclude that you must be in some trouble.

INARA

You have to go.

MAL

And you have to come with me. Unless I'm wrong and you really did just ask me here to make sport of me—

INARA

<Be going away>!

MAL

I just wanna know if you're—

INARA

I'm fine! I'm... giddy.

MAL

For a woman schooled in telling a man what he wants to hear, you ain't much of a liar.

INARA

Mal, you *cannot* handle this man.

The Operative enters through a set of DOUBLE DOORS, carrying a LONG BRIEFCASE.

OPERATIVE

I have to say, Captain, I'm impressed that you would come for her yourself. And that you would make it this far in that outfit.

MAL

(standing)

I can be very graceful when I need to.

OPERATIVE

I've no doubt. I never expected you to get here this quickly. It's thrilling.

MAL

I'm all aquiver.

Mal sheds his shawl and robe. The two men circle and eye one another like gunslingers.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits in the pilot's chair, nervously FIDDLING with his DINOSAURS. Zoe and Jayne are also here, keeping an eye on the ship's instruments.

A muffled ALARM goes off, and Zoe glances at the screen as an ALLIANCE PATROL BOAT passes overhead.

ZOE

False alarm.

Wash checks his own screen.

WASH
Not false, honey. There really is a ship out there.

ZOE
(smiling)
They don't see us, they don't count.

Jayne snorts.

JAYNE
This one don't find us, the next one will. Or the one after that. Long as that girl's on this ship, we ain't talkin' 'if.' We're talkin' 'when.'

Zoe opens her mouth to say something, but Jayne cuts her off.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Far as I'm concerned the doc and his sis stopped being part of the crew 'soon as they became more'n just fugees. We got the whole of the ruttin' Alliance breathing down our backs, and we're sitting here like *yu ben di ya zi* <stupid ducks>.

Another muffled alarm goes off. Jayne gives Zoe a "Toldya so" look.

JAYNE (cont'd)
I'm going for a walk. Enjoy my last few minutes of free-man's air.

He heads out.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – SAME TIME

Mal and the Operative square off. Inara removes her veil, kneels at the altar, picks a white incense stick.

MAL
What are you doing?

INARA
I'm praying for you, Mal.

MAL
Why's everyone always prayin' for me? You and the Shepherd oughta start a prayer circle.

OPERATIVE

She's very thoughtful, Captain Reynolds. But I mean it when I say you're not in any danger.

Mal glances at her, noticing the cuts on her face.

MAL

Did you hurt her?

OPERATIVE

Of course not. I'm interested in the other girl. I'd consider it a kindness if we skip the part where you tell me you don't know what I'm talking about.

MAL

Speak your piece.

OPERATIVE

I think you're beginning to understand how dangerous River Tam is.

MAL

She is a mite unpredictable. Mood swings, of a sort.

OPERATIVE

It's worse than you know.

MAL

It usually is.

OPERATIVE

That girl will rain destruction down on you and your ship. She's an albatross, Captain.

MAL

Way I remember it, albatross was a ship's good luck... 'til some idiot killed it.

(to Inara)

Yes, I've read a poem. Try not to faint.

The Operative moves further into the room, depositing his briefcase on a chair. Whenever he moves, Mal counters.

OPERATIVE

I've seen your war record. I know how you must feel about the Alliance.

MAL

You really don't.

OPERATIVE

Fair to say. But I have to hope you understand you can't beat us.

The men continue to circle each other warily.

MAL

Got no need to beat you. I just wanna go my way.

OPERATIVE

And you can do that, once you let me take River Tam back home. Give me the opportunity to help you.

MAL

All I gotta do is let you take one more thing away from me. I've had a lot of things taken in my time. And it may just be that this is one thing too many.

OPERATIVE

This psychotic, potentially murderous girl who can't have the slightest awareness of your protection... This is where you "draw the line."

MAL

I'm a whimsical soul.

OPERATIVE

There are a number of lives that hang in the balance here. Are they as whimsical as yourself?

Mal stops circling. This gets the Operative's attention.

INT. SERENITY – RIVER'S ROOM– SAME TIME

Simon sits at the edge of River's bed, smoothing her hair.

RIVER

(groggy)

So tired, Simon. What's wrong with me?

SIMON

Shhh. It's all right, *mei mei*. Nothing's wrong.

RIVER

I forgot. For a minute, forgot everything...

SIMON

That's just the sedative. You'll remember soon enough, don't worry.

RIVER

No... I like it. The forgetting...

River drifts off. Simon touches her forehead, then moves toward the door. He opens it, and sees a SHADOW in the hall.

SIMON

You need something?

JAYNE

(edgy)

Just checking to see if you and your sis were okay. You need anything? Tea? Blankets? Loaded gun?

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – SAME TIME

Mal and the Operative continue to study one another.

MAL

No, no, you're working this deal all crabbed. You got to open with payment. Make a flush offer and then we'll see where this conversation goes.

OPERATIVE

(shaking his head)

That's a trap. I offer money, you'll play the man of honor and take umbrage. I ask you to do what's right, you'll play the brigand. I've no stomach for games; I already know you'll not see reason.

MAL

Alliance wanted to show me reason, they shouldn't have sent an assassin.

The Operative is stopped by this.

OPERATIVE

(unhappily)

I have a warship in deep orbit, Captain. We locked on to Serenity's pulse beacon the moment you hit atmo. I can speak a word and send a missile to that exact location inside of three minutes.

Mal pulls the small device Kaylee gave him and tosses it to the Operative.

MAL

You do that, best make peace with your dear and fluffy lord.

OPERATIVE

(impressed, re: the device)

Pulse beacon.

MAL

Advice from an old tracker: you wanna find someone, use your eyes.

OPERATIVE

How long do you think you can really run from us?

MAL

Oh, a jack-rabbit, me. 'Sides, I never credited the Alliance with an overabundance of brains. And if you're the best they got...

OPERATIVE

Captain Reynolds, I should tell you so you don't waste your time: You can't make me angry.

INARA

Oh, please. Spend an hour with him.

Mal smiles — then glares at Inara, mouthing “Hey!”

OPERATIVE

This ends in exactly one way. River Tam —or her body— returned to us. I need her, Captain. River is... my purpose and I will gather her to me. Whatever else happens is incidental. In the greater scheme.

MAL

Why is it that the greater scheme always makes everything not that great?

OPERATIVE

The Alliance has made our worlds safer, more civilized... That's fact. That may not mean anything to you, but it does to me. I believe in a better world.

MAL

I expect you do.

The Operative begins to sit down.

OPERATIVE

I want to resolve this like civilized men. I'm not threatening you. I'm unarmed—

MAL

Good!

Mal draws his GUN and SHOOTs the Operative in the chest, knocking the man back and out of his chair.

Holding Inara protectively behind him, Mal tentatively approaches the Operative's prone form.

MAL

I think I—

And in the instant that Mal is distracted, half turning to Inara, the Operative is up and on him. He whirls Mal around, grabbing him in a choke-hold from behind.

OPERATIVE

I am of course wearing full body armor. I'm not a moron.

He tosses Mal hard against a wall, spinning and blocking a blow from Inara, then he flat-heels her to the ground within seconds.

Mal is going for his gun again, turning, and the Operative kicks him in the face, sends him back, gun flying.

Mal gets to his feet and they square off, Mal breathing hard, nose dripping blood. The Operative is perfectly poised, waiting.

MAL

No back up? We're making an awful ruckus...

OPERATIVE

They'll come when they're needed.

MAL

I'd start whistling.

OPERATIVE

Captain, what do you think is going to happen here?

They come at each other. The Operative is the much better trained — he's fluid, his blows sparse and deadly. Mal is more bluster and determination, though he's veteran enough to go for the right blows.

The Operative gets Mal from behind, bunches his fingers to punch into a nerve cluster, but Mal launches them both onto a stool, smashing it as they hit ground, with the Operative on the bottom.

Mal's advantage lasts all of a second. The Operative is on him, and his precision is wearing Mal down.

Mal punches wild — The Operative counters with a spin-kick to the head that sends Mal to the ground not far from Inara, breathing hard. He tries to rise again, painfully, but Inara places her hand on his arm.

The Operative goes to the BRIEFCASE and pulls out a SWORD.

OPERATIVE

That was bracing. Thank you. But now we have to speed things up.

MAL

(in pain)

Is that Alliance issue?

(to Inara)

Probably a budget thing...

OPERATIVE

(smiles)

That's good. No. This is mine. I'm a classicist.

INARA

(dead calm)

Not a lunatic.

OPERATIVE

(to Inara)

Nothing here is what it seems.

INARA

I know.

The Operative closes on Mal, sword in hand.

OPERATIVE

He's not the plucky hero. The Alliance isn't some evil empire. This isn't the grand arena.

INARA

And that's not incense.

The Operative turns to look: the incense stick burns away — rather like a fuse—

—and FLASHES in an explosion of light and sound. Everything goes smoky white and the sound dies to a tiny buzz.

Act Three

INT. BENA - TRAINING HOUSE - INARA'S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The Operative tries to get his bearings — and four ALLIANCE SOLDIERS are in his face, asking him for orders—

He looks over and Mal and Inara are gone. He motions for the men to follow them.

OPERATIVE

Go! Go! I'm fine. Just a flash bomb!

He gets to his feet, tries to shake it off as the men move out.

OPERATIVE

Stop them! Find Serenity. Find River Tam!

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – CORRIDOR

Inara leads Mal (who is reholstering his gun) down some steps and along a corridor. The sound is still tinny and weird.

MAL

...I had him...

INARA

What?

MAL

(deafly loud)

I think that I was winning!

She rolls her eyes as they keep moving. An ALLIANCE SOLDIER comes abreast of them. Mal pulls Inara out of the way and exchanges fire, downing the man.

They enter:

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – CLASSROOM – CONTINUOUS

Where they move past a shocked group of girls clearly not paying attention to their Dulcimer lessons. As they push their way through the group, two ALLIANCE SOLDIERS appear behind a SCREEN.

MAL
Everybody down!

The girls hit the floor, screeching, as Mal shoots the soldiers through the screen and drags Inara after him out of the classroom.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – CORRIDOR

Mal and Inara enter another corridor, and Inara leads him down a set of shallow stone stairs and presses a LEVER. A section of the wall slides back, revealing a TRAP DOOR, which leads to:

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – DARK CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

Where Inara leads Mal through a darkened tunnel.

MAL
Didn't figure Companions'd have secret passageways.
Mighty handy, though.

INARA
Mal, don't take this the wrong way, but in your next life I hope you come back as a polyp.

MAL
Is that good?

INARA
Do you have any idea what those girls we left back there will be facing because of you?

MAL
Because of me? Who all did the asking over? 'Cause I sure as hell didn't invite you anywhere.

INARA
You know I had no choice.

MAL
Whereas I shoulda let you twist and go my way whistling!
That ain't my theme, lady.

INARA
That's entirely your theme.

MAL
You know, in your next life I hope you come back as a
nasty, overbearing shrew. Then you won't have to learn
any new skills!

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Kaylee and Simon work on one of the metal barrels, filling it with a metal framework of high tech guts and cables. A line leads from the mass of wires they're working on to Ben's LAPTOP, which he balances expertly on one palm while typing with the other hand.

BEN
I think we're good. Close it up.

He disconnects the cord—

ZOE (via comm unit)
How we doin' down there?

KAYLEE
More'n halfway done. These oughta set their heads a-
spinnin'!

There are six barrels left, including the one that they're working on.

EXT. BENA – MOUNTAINSIDE – CONTINUOUS

Mal and Inara move quickly down through the snow. Mal looks down, sees the SHUTTLE... surrounded by four ALLIANCE SOLDIERS.

MAL
(under his breath)
Gorrammit.

Mal pulls a fancy-looking GRENADE out of his pocket. Pops the top and ROLLS the grenade down towards the shuttle.

CLOSE ON: THE GRENADE, as a series of bars of light go out one by one, counting down—

ALLIANCE SOLDIER
Grenade!

The Alliance soldiers dive for cover. The moment they do, Mal and Inara jump down from the ledge and race for the shuttle, Mal sweeping up the grenade just as the last light goes out...

And nothing happens.

One soldier turns to look and Mal shoots him back down as the door shuts on him and Inara.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Mal tosses her the "grenade"—

MAL
They love the colorful lights...

—and starts punching in the ignition sequence. Inara pushes into the pilot's seat.

INARA
Let me fly.

MAL
You sure you remember how it—

He nearly falls over as:

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

The shuttle shoots straight up, spinning and heading out.

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – SAME TIME

The Operative steps out into the light, still shaking off the effects of the flash bomb. He is met by a trio of soldiers led by CAPTAIN CHIEN.

CHIEN
Fighters are up and in pursuit, sir. Captain Reynolds will not—

OPERATIVE
Captain Reynolds is of no concern to me. Find me River Tam!

Four Alliance FIGHTERS roar overhead, breaking off into pairs, heading in different directions.

CHIEN
Sir, are you all right?

OPERATIVE
I'm fine. Get me a portable com unit.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE - SAME TIME

The snowy terrain bullets by.

INARA
Where are we going?

MAL
Serenity's east of us, nestled in the low ranges.
(hitting the com)
Wash, you there?

WASH (via com)
Ready and waiting. You coming to us, or are we—

Static.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Zoe looks at Wash. Wash taps the com unit.

ZOE
What happened?

WASH
I don't—

OPERATIVE (via com)
Attention, Firefly class transport Serenity. I speak to you
as a representative of the Alliance.

The Operative's voice comes out of every speaker. Wash fiddles with the controls, then looks up at Zoe, shrugging helplessly.

OPERATIVE (cont'd, via com)
Your Captain believes me to be your enemy. Your Captain
is wrong.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – SAME TIME

Kaylee, Simon, and Ben look up from their work as the Operative's voice comes tinnily through the com unit taped to the wall.

OPERATIVE (cont'd, via com)
Since he refuses to see reason, I appeal to you on his behalf.

INT. SERENITY – RIVER'S ROOM – SAME TIME

River lies asleep. The Operative's voice is muffled and distant through the door.

OPERATIVE (cont'd, via com)
All I require is River Tam. Dead or alive.

INT. SERENITY – JAYNE'S BUNK – SAME TIME

Jayne sits on his bed, listening.

OPERATIVE (cont'd, via com)
Give her to me, and you are free to go. You will not be bound by law. I will, in fact, clear your records of any existing charges.

He stands. With purpose.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

The shuttle whips by, followed by a pair of sleek Alliance fighters.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Mal and Inara are just as stunned as the crew of Serenity.

OPERATIVE (cont'd, via com)
Keep her from me, and I will order my gunships to blow your Captain out of the sky. And make no mistake, you will be next.

MAL
The guy's bluffing. They probably won't shoot us down 'til we reach Seren—

The shuttle rattles as a bright explosion hits off their port side. Mal lurches forward.

MAL (cont'd)
(picking himself up)
Huh. So I'm wrong. Can you lose them?

INARA
Those are warships, Mal. Built in this century.

MAL
Don't tell me what I know.

There's a loud BANG as something explodes, rocking the shuttle and nearly causing Mal to lose his balance again.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Zoe leans over Wash, touching his shoulder.

ZOE
Get us in the air.

Wash nods. Hits the controls.

Zoe turns and begins to leave the bridge with purpose.

WASH
Where you goin', babe?

ZOE
(over her shoulder)
Got something I want to check on out back.

EXT. BENA – MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

Inara's shuttle slips between two very NARROW PEAKS, forcing the pursuing Alliance fighters to circle back, causing them to lose ground.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – SAME TIME

Kaylee works stuffing guts into one barrel while Ben and Simon lower another barrel—apparently complete—into some sort of circular, high tech APPARATUS that fits snugly over its bottom.

ZOE (OS)
Everything okay down there?

Zoe looks down at them from the UPPER CATWALK.

KAYLEE

Peachy!

BEN

We're working fast as we can. Y'know, you really should keep these on hand if you're gonna need so many.

ZOE

(to Simon)

Doctor, you seen your sister?

Simon looks up from his work.

SIMON

She's... The Captain asked me to sedate her.

Zoe nods.

ZOE

Might want to hold on. I think things are gonna get bumpy.

She walks off.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash is almost ready to go.

MAL (via com)

We're comin' in hard, Wash, and we're not alone.

WASH

How much of a lead you got?

MAL (via com)

Not much. Inara bought us a couple of seconds. I need you airborne—

WASH

(working controls)

Way ahead of you.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

She's in a low chasm, and she slowly rises, pushing up billowing clouds of snow.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

On the upper catwalk, Jayne looks around cautiously, eying the AIRLOCK to the other shuttle.

River, semi-conscious, is in the crook of his left arm, half-walking, half-dragged.

As they approach the shuttle door—

ZOE (OS)
(softly)
I really hope you two are dancing.

Zoe steps out of the shadows. The look on her face is one of disappointment, almost sadness.

EXT. BENA – MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

Serenity rises majestically...

Only to find her path cut off by two ALLIANCE WARSHIPS.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

WASH (into com)
We might have a problem, Mal.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Zoe interposes herself between Jayne and the door.

JAYNE
You know what I'm doin', Zoe. It's what you should be doin', you wanna save Mal.

ZOE
Can't let you do that. You know it.

He goes for his gun an instant before she does, but she's faster on the draw, so it happens at the same time:

Jayne puts the barrel of his gun against Zoe's forehead, and she jams the end of her mare's leg under his chin.

They stand there, frozen in a John Woo-style standoff, while the ship quivers around them.



Act Four

INT. SERENITY – UPPER CATWALK – CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Jayne. Standoff.

JAYNE

Well, ain't this a predicament?

Jayne licks his lips, glances at River, still pliant and drugged in his left arm.

ZOE (cont'd)

So what? You think we can just hand her over then go on our merry?

JAYNE

Sounds on the right side of fair. Ain't crazy about the lack a' reward, but livin' through the day has a bona fide sweetness to it. Hell, ain't that our creed?

ZOE
Captain says she stays, she stays.

The ship rocks, swaying them all.

JAYNE
Or?

ZOE
(shifting the gun against his chin)
Or Kaylee spends a fortnight cleanin' your head outta that
vent up there.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

The shuttle moves in and out of sight, racing forward.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE – ELSEWHERE – SAME TIME

Serenity rockets on, pursued by two Alliance warships. One launches a missile that explodes just shy of Serenity's tail section, rocking the Firefly hard and causing it to tilt to one side.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Zoe and Jayne stand their ground as the deck rolls under them.

ZOE (cont'd)
(dead calm)
I'm tellin' you one last time, Jayne—

JAYNE
You gonna tell me I'm wrong? You gonna tell me we
wouldn't be better off without 'em!?

Zoe looks down.

JAYNE (cont'd)
You don't gotta do nothin'. Just step aside.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

In a series of QUICK CUTS, Serenity and Inara's shuttle approach each other, each pursued by a pair of warships.

Serenity flies high, almost bouncing over the mountaintops, while the shuttle continues to wind through the peaks.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Inara is all Wash-like with concentration.

MAL
Come in hard and then drop.
(into com)
Wash, you know what to do?

INARA
Just hang on to something.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

ZOE
I'll make this plain, 'cause I need you to understand it
ain't fiction. I will count to three. You will have lowered
your gun and let River go by then, or I. Will. End. You.

Jayne doesn't back down. Tightens his grip on his gun.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE

Serenity and the shuttle are in sight of one another.

CLOSE IN ON THE SHUTTLE: as it takes a steep dive.

CLOSE IN ON SERENITY: coming on like gangbusters.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

ZOE
One.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE

The shuttle slides under Serenity, almost scraping paint. The two pursuing warbirds do the same, and one of them actually does make contact, leaving a long SCRATCH on Serenity's underbelly.

Serenity stops dead in the air, and her pursuers overshoot. One sideswipes a mountaintop—not destroyed, but smoking and out of action.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

ZOE

Two.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE

Inara’s shuttle jerks straight up as Serenity’s back engine FLARES UP—causing the snow to turn into a snow storm and an avalanche, tumbling down and crippling the two ships pursuing the shuttle.

Serenity rockets up and off, leaving the shuttle to fly straight up and out of the chaos.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

ZOE

Th—

Zoe, Jayne and River are all thrown to the side as Serenity blasts away.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

Inara’s shuttle levels off... and the surviving warship that was originally following Serenity takes up pursuit.

INT. INARA’S SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Inara stares straight ahead. Mal is gone.

INARA

(“told you so”)

I told you to hang on to something.

MAL (OS)

(in great pain)

I’m fine...

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

Serenity swoops in above and behind the Alliance ship. Serenity's thrusters tilt down, but the warship is unaffected by the backburn.

The shuttle comes about, looking back at Serenity and the other ship, as the warbird tilts its guns up to fire into Serenity's underbelly.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Mal, barely standing, sees this through the forward viewport and dives forward, smacking the com unit.

MAL (into com)
Wash! Drop dead!

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash is confused—

WASH
Wuh?

—but only briefly. He flips switches.

The lights go out. The sound of the engines suddenly disappears, and for a moment, eerie silence prevails.

EXT. BENA – SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE – SAME TIME

Serenity goes dead and simply plummets down on top of the warbird like an anvil, hitting the other ship and crushing it into the ground .

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

On the upper catwalk, the lights flicker back on.

Jayne, Zoe, and River are all on the deck. Jayne and Zoe eye each other.

BELOW

Barrels are rolling around, and electronic STUFF is strewn everywhere. Simon helps Kaylee get up. Ben pushes himself into a sitting position from underneath one of the barrels.

BEN
(to himself)
I miss gravity... Sweet, sweet gravity...

EXT. BENA – MOUNTAIN RANGE – MOMENTS LATER

The shuttle settles into its home atop Serenity.

Serenity takes off away from the mountains, and into the black.

INT. SERENITY – OUTSIDE INARA’S SHUTTLE – MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Inara, both looking a little shaken, come in.

MAL
Did he touch you?

INARA
What?

MAL
The government man.

INARA
(looking away, soft, regretful)
Jude.

MAL
Did he touch you at all? Could he have planted anything
on you, any kind of beacon?

Beat.

INARA
Wanna search me?

The question is so loaded that Mal cannot reply for a moment—and in that moment, Kaylee rushes up to them.

KAYLEE
Inara!

She throws herself into Inara’s arms, kissing her a bunch of times.

INARA
Kaylee, *mei-mei*. I missed you.

KAYLEE

It's been horrible since you left. Mal's like a monster.

MAL

A monster who's standin' right here!

Others begin appearing: Simon and Ben come up after Kaylee, and Zoe, Jayne, and groggy River come across from the other side of the catwalk.

Inara turns to Simon. They clap hands, formally but with great warmth.

INARA

<Simon. I'm sorry this has to come upon you>.

SIMON

<Sorrier I am that you have been dragged into this>.

MAL

Shiny as this little reunion is, the rescue portion of this operation ain't over yet.

Mal signals Zoe to come with him, and heads forward, toward the bridge.

INARA

(following)

Rescue? I'm sorry, are you implying that you rescued me?

MAL

Who snuck in and pulled you out of—

INARA

You'd still be getting your kidneys punched if I hadn't had the insane notion of thinking ahead—

Zoe looks back at the others, rolls her eyes.

MAL

There was rescuing. Of different kinds. Let's not get all manic over details...

Then they're gone.

KAYLEE

Yep. They're back. Both of 'em.

INT. ALLIANCE PATROL BOAT – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

The acting captain, LIEUTENANT WALLACE, has a bandage over his left ear and part of his face. He stares out the forward viewport, which shows signs of recent repair.

WALLACE
They're gone.

CHIEN (via Wave)
Say again, Lieutenant Wallace?

WALLACE
Sir, I apologize. We lost them. We have no visual. They could be anywhere.

OPERATIVE (via Wave)
Regrettable. But we still have a way to track them. Get a read on the nav sat. It's a registered transport, you must be able to locate—

Wallace leans over the shoulder of one of his BRIDGE CREW as they both look at a screen.

WALLACE
Sir...

OPERATIVE (via Wave)
Have you found a nav-sat trajectory?

EXT. SERENITY – SPACE

Serenity shoots away from Bena, all lights dimmed or off, barely visible against the stars.

A HATCH on Serenity's belly opens up, releasing seven of the metal barrels Kaylee, Simon and Ben have been working on.

They're CRYBABIES, which spark silently to life—from the engine housings at their ends—and shoot off in seven different directions, as Serenity's TAIL lights up and she BLASTS off into space.

WALLACE (VO)
We've found seven.

EXT. BENA – COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – SAME TIME

The Operative, standing on a terrace with Chien, frowns.

OPERATIVE

(to himself)

Does he think this is a game?

(turning to Chien)

Prepare one of the harriers. Captain Wallace will follow. If he performs as ably as you've indicated he will, I'll see that his field promotion becomes permanent.

CHIEN

Sir, I should really take command of—

OPERATIVE

No. I need you here to coordinate efforts, Commodore.

Off Chien's surprised stare, the Operative walks briskly back into:

THE GUILD HALLS

Forcing Chien to rush to keep pace.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Contact all assets specified in Protocol Seven.

CHIEN

Protocol Seven!? Sir, that was never meant to be taken—

The Operative turns and gives Chien a look that makes it clear exactly who's in charge.

OPERATIVE

I will make the decision of what is necessary and what is not, Commodore. Contact the specified assets and wait for word from me.

EXT. SPACE – LATER

Serenity cuts through the black.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

Inara sits in a chair, letting Simon look her over. Everyone but Wash and Ben is there, too. Mal watches Inara closely, and Jayne keeps glancing at Zoe as he munches on what's left of the popcorn. River stands in the doorway of the infirmary, watching distantly, almost shyly.

Simon gently cleans one of the cuts on Inara's face.

SIMON

He... how bad was it? Really?

Inara pushes his hand away, a bit impatiently, but remains silent.

SIMON (cont'd)

Please, Inara. He's after River. I need to know.

Inara stands.

INARA

We have every reason to be afraid.

JAYNE

Why? Cause this guy beat Mal up? That's not so hard.

MAL

He didn't beat me up, nobody said tha—

INARA

Because he's a believer. He's intelligent, methodical, and devout in his belief that killing River is the right thing to do.

JAYNE

So no hope of a reward, huh?

Zoe glares at Jayne. Jayne looks down.

Wash walks in.

WASH

Set a course for Haven. All winding and circuitous-like. We should just about coast in on fumes.

MAL

Nothing like the long, lonely road. No signs of pursuit?

WASH

(shakes his head)

Anything comes up now, Ben'll give a yell.

Wash sits down next to Zoe, grabbing the last of the popcorn right before Jayne can get it.

SIMON

(to Inara)

Did he mention anything about Miranda?

INARA
Who's Miranda?

MAL
Not who. Where. A planet.
(to Simon)
He didn't say nothing 'bout it.

INARA
Why would a planet be of concern to the Alliance?

MAL
Don't have a clue, but they obviously think whatever
River knows about it is a threat to them.

Folk glance at River. She looks down.

WASH
Do we care? Are we caring about that?

Jayne slams his fist on the table so hard that some of the burnt kernels jump out of the bowl.

JAYNE
(yelling, banging the table)
You dumbass hogs, the only people she's a threat to is us
on this boat!

River retreats a step back into the infirmary.

MAL
Look, we get back to Haven in half a day's time—

JAYNE
Oh, yeah. Hiding under the Shepherd's skirts... that's a
manful scheme.

MAL
You wanna run this ship!?

JAYNE
Yes.

Not the reply Mal was expecting.

MAL
Well...
(no better answer)
You can't.

JAYNE
Do a damn sight better job than you.

He gets to his feet.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Getting us lashed over a couple of strays.
(to Simon)
No offense, Doc, I think it's noble as a grape the way you
look to River. But she ain't my sister...
(to Mal)
... and she ain't your crew. Oh, and neither is she exactly
helpless! So where's it writ that we got to lay down our
lives for her? Which is what you've steered us toward.

MAL
I didn't start this.

JAYNE
No, that's right. Alliance starts the war, and then you
volunteer. Battle of Serenity, Mal. Besides Zoe here, how
many—

Mal turns around and starts towards the stairs.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Hey! I'm talking at you!

Mal turns back around.

JAYNE (cont'd)
(softly)
How many men in your platoon came out of there alive?

ZOE
(dead cold)
You wanna leave this room.

Zoe and Jayne lock gazes. There's an uncomfortable moment where it seems one or
both will draw a gun, The Jayne looks away and heads toward the stairs.

JAYNE
Damn right, I do.

He stalks upstairs. There's a quiet moment.

INARA
This isn't the war, Mal.

MAL

You telling me that 'cause you think I don't know?

INARA

You came to the Training House looking for a fight.

MAL

You think I coulda reasoned with him!?

INARA

You could have not shot him.

(no response from Mal)

I just want to know who I'm dealing with. I've seen too many versions of you to be sure.

MAL

(in Inara's face)

I start fighting a war, I guarantee you'll see something new.

He leaves. Inara follows.

SIMON

We'll get off. River and I will get off at Haven. We'll find some...

KAYLEE

Nobody's saying that.

Beat.

WASH

Nobody besides Jayne is saying that.

INT. SERENITY – CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Inara runs after Mal. He stops, turns around.

MAL

I got no answers for you, Inara. I got no rudder. Wind blows northerly, I go north. That's who I am. Maybe that ain't a man to lead, but they have to follow so you wanna tear me down do it inside your own mind!

INARA

I'm not trying to tear you down—

MAL

But you fog things up! You always have — you spin me about. I wish like hell you was elsewhere.

He walks on.

INARA

(to herself)

I was.

EXT. HAVEN – LATER – DAWN

Serenity approaches the dusty moon.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Wash and Ben are on the bridge.

BEN

I can't wait to get home and unpack. I just don't know how you and the others can—

Throughout this, Wash has been looking at his console, increasingly concerned.

WASH

Hold that thought, Ben.

(into com)

Mal you better get up here. Something's—

Mal, apparently right in the hallway, walks onto the bridge, startles Wash.

MAL

What's the tumult?

Wash and Mal realize that Ben is staring out the forward viewport and they look, too.

BEN

Oh, God.

EXT. HAVEN – SAME TIME

Serenity swings around a mountain to come into view of the camp.

It is a world of fire.

Most of the buildings are burning, some blown right apart. Bodies litter the scene, not one of them moving.

BLACKOUT